Dostoievsky Under the Lens

BERESFORD on Dostoievsky ought to be exciting; the young Englishman has himself something of the Russian attitude in his preoccupation with spiritual malformations and abnormalities. He writes interestingly of Constance Garnett's translation of the "White Nights and Other Stories." The review is taken from "Everyman," an English publication:

"The majority of novelists are, and should be, read for the sake of their matter or content and the manner in which they present it. Such artists in literature as Turgeniev or Flaubert, for example, unquestionably felt most intensely all that they wrote. They entered into their story, into the lives and feelings of their characters—how deeply Flaubert has described in his letters—but when they came to actual expression, to the interpretation of their experience in written words, the artist, the deliberate, selective, critical, sensitive workman, was uppermost. Always something in them stood apart—judging. As a consequence, we find pleasure in their works because they are true and beautiful things, designed, as far as may be, to be perfect in themselves. 'Rudin' or 'Madame Bovary' may tell us much of Turgeniev or Flaubert as artists, even suggest certain obvious sympathies or traits of character, but primarily they are studies in life rather than in the individuality of the writer. But while this is partly true also of Dostoievsky's novels it is not true to the same extent; and for that reason I do not believe that any one can fully appreciate his work unless they relate it directly to the man.

"He was from the outset an artist peculiarly handicapped. It has been authoritatively denied that he suffered from epilepsy before his awful experiences in the fortress and his four years in Siberia, but there can be no question that the tendency was there, that he suffered from great physical weakness. He was discharged from the army at the age of twenty-three 'on account of illness,' although what form it took is not specified. And his first novel, 'Poor Folk,' written about this time, begins to develop the early signs of what we can later recognize as his characteristic neurosis. Later, as we know, after his release from Siberia, his life was one perpetual struggle and torment. A great part of it was compulsorily spent away from Russia, whither he was always longing to return; he was never, until the last year or two, free from financial embarrassment; and his illness not only prostrated him physically for days at a time but became, also, a continual threat and horror that preyed upon his mind. Fighting all these immense handicaps, he continued to write profusely, at times with an almost hysterical determination. He turned out tremendous novels, such as 'The Brothers Karamazov,' 'The Idiot,' or 'The Possessed,' without opportunity for reconsideration of detail—his urgency for money forbade rewriting—and further without the possibility for the leisure, detachment and peace of mind which, as he himself fully realized, were essential to him as an artist.

"For these reasons, then, if for no other, we cannot judge the work of Dostoievsky with the same impartial criticism that we should exercise in approaching the works of Turgeniev or Flaubert. We cannot in the same way dissociate Dostoievsky's creative ability from his own personality, nor accept his picture of life without making peculiar allowance for his distorted angle of vision. As Mr. Arthur McDowall says in his recent book on 'Realism,' Dostoievsky 'brings us close to a point where the personal vision is so significant as to transcend any realistic interest in the thing portrayed.' It does not follow from this, however, that he did not present an aspect of truth. He was himself abnormal, and his psychology, which he seems always to have tested by his own experience and sensations, was inevitably abnormal also. But (although we need not on this account accept the theory of Max Nordau) there is sometimes a peculiar relationship between certain forms of neurasthenia and genius. It is as if a weakness of this kind affords a more sensitive instrument for the use of whatever we choose to regard as the influence that seeks to record its message to mankind. And as in abnormal psychology we may find a mere exaggeration, and hence a more legible explanation of the normal, so we may read in Dostoievsky's work some of the broad intrinsic weaknesses and virtues of humanity displayed something above life size.

"A peculiarly interesting instance for any one who is interested in the modern theory of this subject is afforded by the most considerable item in the collection of short stories now under review. It is called 'Notes from Underground,' and occupies more than a hundred of the 288 pages that make up the whole volume. The first part of this 'novel' is a self-analysis of the supposed author's own character. He filled some small post in the immense organization of the old Russian bureaucracy and suffered from what we call in the terminology of psycho-analysis an 'inferiority complex.' Of the origins of that trouble we learn nothing. Dostoievsky himself, of course, is sublimely unaware that he is offering us a perfect example of a pathological case. But the symptoms are, as a doctor might say, 'beautifully true to type.' The chief of them is a perpetual attempt to demonstrate, in perfectly futile ways, some effect of superiority. The familiar instance is the driver of a cart who from the vantage of his position can intimidate the foot passenger by a threat of running him down. In the case of the imagined author of 'Underground' we find that this longing to assert himself is the keynote of all his actions, and finds expression, at last, in the writing of a piece of autobiography. He knows by sight an officer, constantly meets him on the street, and while invariably giving way to him on the pavement plans with a large and earnest deliberation to confront and jostle him at their next encounter. Once he actually succeeds in doing this, but so ineffectually that he can find no comfort in the thought of having vindicated his self-esteem. Another example is the dinner party given to an old school friend, to which the writer invites himself, and succeeds in getting himself despised still further in his effort to display some kind of superiority to his companions. But most typical of all is his account of his relations with the girl Liza, whom he meets in a brothel. He attracts her in the first place by the eloquence with which he holds up to her the terror of her future. He obtains an influence over her, persuades her to give up her way of life, gives her his private address, and then, when she comes to see him, treats her with a callousness and a pandering to his own diseased vanity that is nothing less than brutal. As a study for the psychologist the story is almost perfect.

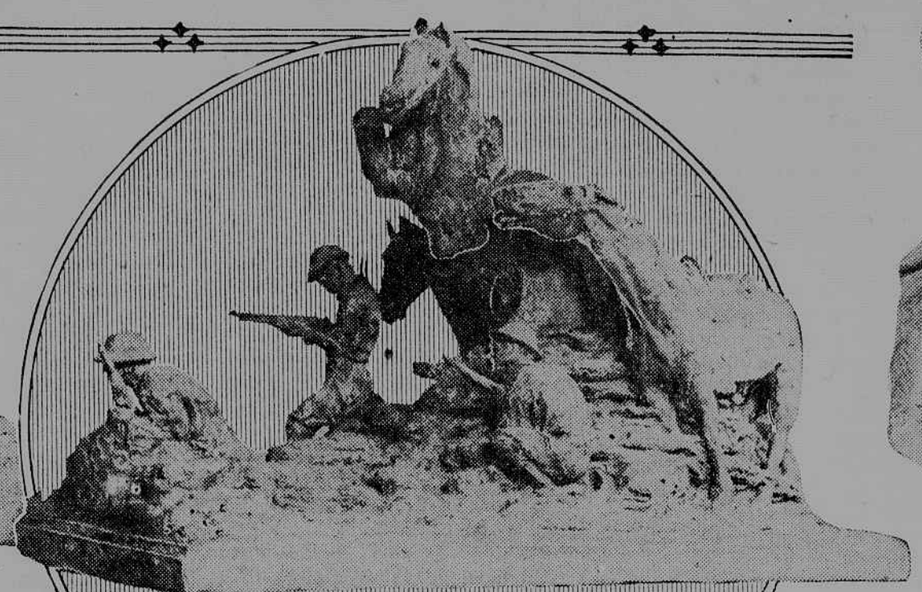
"We find a parallel to it in the allied story of Smerdyakov, the valet, in 'The Brothers Karamazov.' And, indeed, throughout Dostoievsky's works the remarkable realization of this 'inferior complex' is recognizable as the ever-present background of his psychology. The man who is abhorrent to him and draws forth his bitterest invective is always self-confident and successful. In 'A Little Hero' (another study in the present volume written when he was thirty-two, while he was a prisoner at Omsk), he says: 'These gentlemen make their way in the world through the fact that all their instincts are bent in the direction of coarse sneering, short-sighted censure and immense conceit. . . . They are never capable of inner judgment before their conscience, of generous self-criticism; for some things they are too fat. Their own priceless personality, their Baal and Moloch, their magnificent ego, is always in their foreground everywhere.' And so on for more than a page, all the bitterness of it being another typical example of the general characteristics of Dostoievsky's novels and presenting another well-diagnosed symptom of the same neurosis.

"For, personally, I have no doubt whatever that Dostoievsky himself suffered from this particular affection. The evidence of his letters alone would be sufficient to establish it. Witness particulary the prostration of his appeals for help and patronage shown in the letters written by him during his last few months in Siberia. But his writing furnishes still better material for the diagnosis, and a priori, it seems impossible that he could have so perfectly described this particular state of mind if he had not personally experienced something of its peculiar expressions. In all probability the epilepsy was nothing more than an effect of the pre-determining cause, and the fact that the symptoms in his case were not progressively destructive was due to his ability to 'sublimate' his inhibitions—in part, at least—by his aoility to find expression in writing. It is very saddening to reflect that if he had lived fifty years later he might have been cured, and his unquestionable genius more fully realized."

The Soul of War in Bronze

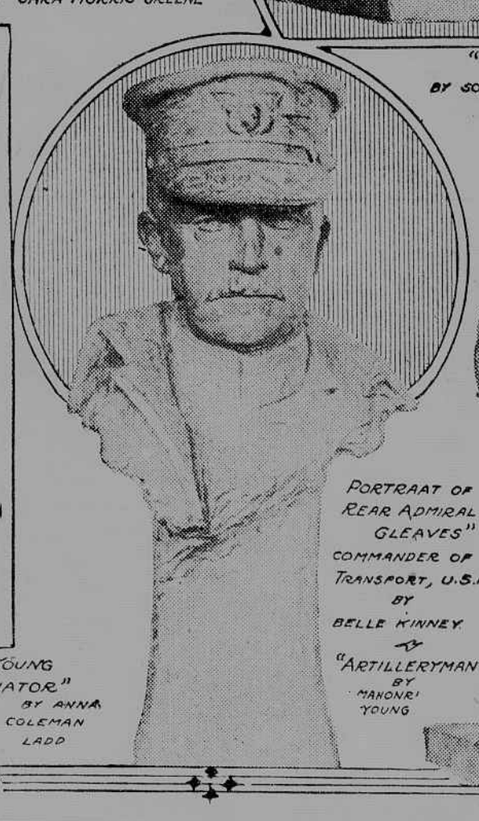
CRITICS hold that the furnace of war is too hot for the creation of great art; what is significant comes later when thought has had time to turn and contemplate the "remembered emotion." But out of war come facts, and the pieces of sculpture being shown at the Gorham Gallery will probably always retain an authentic flavor of war time that no creation of a later period will be able to achieve. After December 9 the exhibition will be moved to the American Art Galleries as a part of the Salon of the Allies, opened to the public under the auspices of the art commission of the Mayor's Committee on National Defence.

"A POET OF THE AIR" BY SARA MORRIS GREENE



"A MODERN CRUSADER" BY MALVINA HOFFMANN

"A YOUNG AVIATOR" BY ANNA COLEMAN LADD



"CARRY ON" BY SOLON BORGLUM

PORTRAAT OF REAR ADMIRAL GLEAVES" COMMANDER OF TRANSPORT, U.S.N BY BELLE KINNEY

"ARTILLERYMAN" BY MAHONRI YOUNG

"THE RED CROSS" BY MABEL CONKLING

"GUY DRUMMOND" BY R. TAIT McKENZIE

Medals

THE captain talked little enough of himself, but left the bandage about his head to speak for him But how he did talk of that sergeant of his, Barney McGinn!

I had not yet told the captain that Barney McGinn had been my driver, and that I had begged the privilege of entertaining Barney's captain not more to enjoy his own society than to hear him talk about Barney.

"Of course, we hear all sorts of wild yarns about the boys," I remarked. "But it wouldn't surprise me to learn that the episode, for instance, at Château Thierry, where a bunch were said to have dolled themselves up in silk hats and pink parasols, were true. It's so completely in character."

"As true as you're born, sir!"

"It wouldn't surprise me, either, if that sergeant you speak of were concerned in it."

"He was the very instigator of it! That's Barney McGinn all over. You're going to hear more of that fellow, I tell you. He's marked for promotion. Medals already."

I pushed the cigars toward the captain. "The instigator? It sounds plausible, after your description of the man. He must be a devil." And again the recollection of all the captain had said, the vision of that assault on the sublime in the garb of the ludicrous, rocked me with laughter.

"They were all devils, for that matter. Like boys on a lark. But I believe they were devils mainly because that man Sergeant McGinn was the worst devil of the lot. They simply caught the infection from him and followed his example. Up that rotten little ravine he went, with death spitting all about him, and that devil singing! And what do you think he was singing to Fritz? Why, this (and the captain sang in imitation):

"'The bells of hell go ting-a-ling-a-ling,
For you but not for me.
O Death, where is thy sting-a-ling-a-ling
O Grave, thy victoree-ee-e?'

"After he'd sung it a couple of times the boys got on to the words and sang it with him. And there they went, singing that at Fritz. Those fellows might have made that charge stripped to the skin and without a gun in their hands. Such things weren't necessary. Waging war like that wasn't in Heinie's book. It took the breath all out of him. He wasn't there to fight an insane asylum. And it just naturally scared him to death."

But I was laughing at more than this. "Of course," I said, on sobering down, "it wasn't all song and masquerade."

"Oh, decidedly not! But there again that man McGinn was in the thick of it. Thick of it? No! He was out in front. Too far out sometimes. I never saw a man so absolutely without fear. He was the envy of us all. And from the very first, I confess I was a bit nervous as to how we should perform when they gave us our first bit of real schooling. I mean the real thing, the grim business itself, and not the routine drilling behind the lines. What that sergeant thought of me I hate to think now, on the night when I gave him his final instructions. It was the first patrol I was responsible for, and I wanted it to go. Naturally, the man I first thought of to head it was Sergeant McGinn. Not that there was anything for me to be nervous about except the reputation of the company. But I drilled McGinn as if he'd never heard of war before. And all he said when I finished was 'Watch me, sir!' And he fairly smacked his lips. That man was simply born for such things. As some men are born singers or poets, that man is a born soldier. He's got it in him."

"And the patrol was a success?"

"Was it? McGinn came in with sixteen prisoners and a ragged scratch across his right cheek from one of those lovely saw-tooth bayonets. He made his report in a breath; took over his bunch to the intelligence officer, and then hurried to say, 'With your leave, sir, I'd like to be relieved for an hour.'

"'The hour is yours,' said I. 'You've earned it!'

"In thirty-five minutes an orderly called for the company's surgeon, and I went along. There in the dugout stood Sergeant McGinn beside a wounded Boche who was lying on his face on a stretcher. McGinn was scratching his head.

"'I ain't shure, sorr, whether it's accordin' to the book. But I didn't tell you I dropped one of the prisoners. I think, sorr, one of his own men caught him from the rear as we were takin' him along—got him so he could nayther walk nor sit down nor lie on his face, for the mud was too thick. It was pretty awkward for him, sorr. And because he was a major I went out and got him.'"

My guest, the captain, turned out to be a capital raconteur, and until well after the hour when I should have sent him to bed I sat up listening to his yarns—yarns about everything, but plentifully enough about that daredevil who was "born to it," Barney McGinn. Even long after the captain did retire I still sat before the hearth, chuckling at Barney.

It was infinitely more amusing than the captain knew. Vividly enough I remembered Barney, from his year and a half in my employ. Meek, orderly, quiet spoken then, he would start like a cat at a sharp word spoken to him unexpectedly. It once struck me that he seemed always to be listening for something, as if he were always keyed up for the crack of a whip. In time I learned the reason for this. And so I knew then why it was he was such a devil of a soldier.

For thus will a man expand, though a stern country orders him into the very jaws of death, if it incidentally rescues him from under the thumb of a formidable wife.

B. K.

Home

By Berton Braley

I'm coming home again;
On the rail of the Jersey ferry I lean and gaze
On the city I love.
Thrusting their towers above
The light morning haze
Of dust and of smoke and of steam
The star-reaching buildings arise
With their myriad windows agleam
In the warmth and the glow of the sun—
Palaces glorious, spun
Out of stone and of steel on the loom of a dream.

Over the river there comes
The voice of New York; of the slums
And the avenues, rumble and roar
Of packed, multitudinous streets
Athrob with the thunder of traffic that beats
A deep diapason—the roll of the drums
In the city's vast orchestra, playing the score
Of a titanic opus.

The river's alive
With ferries and barges and tugs and with ships
At anchor, in slips
Or swinging downstream with the tide,
Off for the perilous drive
To the maelstrom of war.

As I ride
Home on the ferryboat, home,
To the wonder and thrill of it all
—The hugeness, the splendor and might
Of the city that shoulders in sight—
I sense the old magic of Rome
And I'm gripped by a spell and a thrall;
There's a catch in my throat, and my eyes
Blur at the picture, and then
A jubilant voice in me cries,
"I'm coming home, I'm coming home again!"

The Nation Awaits a Song

By Ernest Thompson Seton

IN THE last four years many thousands of attempts have been made to write a national song, and, so far as known, all have been utter failures.

A glance at the material submitted shows a wholly wrong conception of a national song; indeed, a wrong idea of the whole subject of song.

Apparently none of the aspirants recognized the wide difference between a song and a poem; not one of them recognized the difference between a poem and an anthem; not one of them realized the difference between a lyric and a marching song.

A poem is a more or less pleasing succession of statements, utilizing the beauties of language and ideas; it is designed to be spoken by one voice.

An anthem is a simple poem (in responsive parts originally) set to music, which must be slow enough to permit enunciation by many voices singing at once.

A lyric is a slight poem, a succession of sketch ideas, tied together by a repetitive portion, set to music, to be sung by one voice.

A national song must consist of a succession of very brief, simple, inspiring statements, alternating with a succession of mere vocables — that is, modulated rhythmic shouting, which begets and vents enthusiasm, but does not count for its effect on words or enunciated ideas. It should be in marching time, for that is the time of heroic thought and action, and it must be suitable for a multitude of voices singing together. It may or may not be antiphonal or arranged in responses like the original anthem.

If these definitions be accepted and used as tests we shall find that all recent attempts at a national song have been poems of varying merit, but foredoomed failures from their plan.

It is generally conceded that at present we have no truly national song; certainly none officially established. We rise to the "flag song," but no one considers it satisfactory or permanent. It is accepted till we get a better. An examination of its parts shows that it fails in every essential but one, and that it is overdone. It is replete with heroic statement. But it is not simple; it is not good rhythm; it is not suitable for singing; it is not a marching song; it does not offer a repeated phrase of swinging, stirring vocables in which all can join.

I do not know anything to commend its rival "America," except the dignity of the music, which is preempted by Great Britain.

One can select from a long list of national songs examples which have been kept alive by one or more of the essentials already listed, in spite of their lack of the other elements. The "Marseillaise," for instance, though superb in rhythm, ring and tramp, is far overburdened by statements, for which weakness, however, the national genius has found a remedy by ignoring the statements, except the initial one of each section, turning the rest into mere trumpetesque vocable.

Very rarely do we hear more than the first two lines of the "Marseillaise." The genius of the people is greater than the genius of the man who wrote it. The fact is that it is the French national air, but it is not truly their national song.

On the other hand, every song that has sprung spontaneously from the heart of the people responds in form to these rules, but not always, alas! in the elevation of its sentiment. The darky plantation songs and revival hymns are cases in point.

"Mary and Martha," or, "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," are good examples of perfect song form carried by ring and swing, by the appeal to the popular ear without any appeal to the higher instincts or emotions.

Shakespeare's songs are commonly correct, as, for example, the page's song in "As You Like It":

It was a lover and his lass,
With a hey and a ho, and a hey nonino,
That o'er the green cornfields did pass
In springtime, the only pretty ring time,
When birds do sing, hey ding a ding, ding;
Sweet lovers love the spring.

The second, fourth, fifth and sixth lines are the repetitive portion throughout.

The traditional songs of England, Ireland and Scotland are usually correct, although they have been curiously hybridized by the ballad, which is simply rhythmic history and has little in common with the national song.

The traditional song "A froggie he would a-wooing go" is an example of perfect form in the lyric.

If we take various popular patriotic songs that our country has produced we find only three that have in any measure established themselves in the hearts and voices of the people as national songs. They are "John Brown's Body," "Yankee Doodle" and "Dixie," all three born of the heroic spirit of the time, and all filling the definition perfectly, except that the slight statement prefacing each new explosion of vocables is unheroic; is, indeed, absurd and a careful analysis shows that these are, each and all of them, national airs, not national songs. If some of our poets would rewrite these in accord with the genius of patriotic song we should probably have an accepted, permanent national song.

And which of our poets is competent? I hope I shall not be thought flippant if I claim that the man who can compose a successful college yell is more likely than any other to be equipped for the problem and respond with the much desired expression of national spirit. As a step toward the solution I suggest that one acceptable form might be thus:

..... } Brief, rhythmic statement
..... } suitable for one or maybe more voices.

..... } Mere vocables, modulated
..... } rhythmic shouting for
..... } many voices; repeated
..... } at alternate intervals.

Such a structural unit rendered in simple, martial strains, repeated twice or thrice, might fulfil all the conditions and supply us at once with a national air and a national song—one that will answer to this the great test that it so exactly voices the national feeling in time of exaltation that it becomes the spontaneous expression of noble, patriotic emotion, and fixes itself so firmly in the minds of the people that it can live without print.